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Letter dated 10 October 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government and further to the letter dated 20 August 2003, I have the honour to draw your attention to new violations of the flight information region (FIR) of Nicosia and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus by military aircraft of the Turkish Air Force recorded on 25, 27 and 28 August; on 4, 18 and 23 September; and on 6 and 7 October 2003, as follows:

On 25 August 2003, one (1) Turkish military aircraft of unknown type took off from the illegal airport of Lefkoniko in the occupied part of Cyprus, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before exiting towards the FIR of Ankara.

On the same day, one (1) CN-235 Turkish military aircraft, coming from the FIR of Ankara, entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before landing at the illegal airport of Lefkoniko. The aircraft later took off, departing towards the FIR of Ankara.

On 27 August 2003, six (6) F-16 Turkish military aircraft, coming from the FIR of Ankara in one formation, entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations, before exiting in a westerly direction.

On 28 August 2003, one (1) AB-205 Turkish military aircraft, coming from the FIR of Ankara, entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before landing at the illegal airport of Lefkoniko and later at the illegal airport of Krini.

On 4 September 2003, one (1) CN-235 Turkish military aircraft entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before landing at the illegal airport of Lefkoniko. The aircraft departed the following day.

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On 18 September 2003, four (4) Turkish military aircraft of unknown type, coming from a westerly direction, entered the FIR of Nicosia in one formation, violating international air traffic regulations, before exiting towards the FIR of Ankara.

On 23 September 2003, two (2) F-16 Turkish military aircraft, coming from the FIR of Ankara in one formation, entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations, before exiting towards a reverse direction.

On the same day, one (1) Turkish military aircraft of unknown type took off from the illegal airport of Krini, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before exiting towards the FIR of Ankara.

On the same day 2003, one (1) Turkish military aircraft entered the FIR of Nicosia, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the occupied area of Mesaoria, before landing at the illegal airport of Lefkoniko.

On 6 October 2003, four (4) F-16 Turkish military aircraft, in one formation, coming from a westerly direction, entered the Nicosia FIR, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, before exiting towards the FIR of Ankara.

On 7 October 2003, one (1) COUGAR Turkish military aircraft took off from the illegal airport of Lefkoniko, violating international air traffic regulations and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, flying over the area of Mesaoria, before exiting towards the FIR of Ankara.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, I strongly protest all the above-mentioned violations of the Nicosia FIR and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus, which are contrary to international law as well as to Security Council resolutions on Cyprus. We sincerely hope that the Government of Turkey, taking into consideration its international obligations, will refrain from further violations, respect the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus and contribute substantively to the efforts for a just and functional solution to the Cyprus problem, on the basis of United Nations resolutions.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 30, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Andreas D. **Mavroyiannis**

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Fifty-eighth session
Agenda item 40 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/152, as well as subsequent decisions of the General Assembly on this subject matter. It highlights some of the key activities undertaken to respond to natural disasters during the reporting period and reflects some of the initiatives undertaken to strengthen disaster management efforts at the national and regional levels. It also provides information on the funding trends for natural disaster response.

* The report was delayed due to difficulties encountered in the compilation and subsequent clarification of statistics on natural disasters.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/152 of 16 December 2002. A number of issues relevant to the report are also addressed in the reports of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/58/89-E/2003/85) and on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/58/277).

II. Natural disaster response

2. The response of affected Governments and the international community to natural disasters and environmental emergencies continues to be crucial to the recovery and long-term development of affected communities. During the reporting period, there has been progress in a number of areas related to disaster management, particularly in relation to capacity-building and policy development at the local, national, regional and international levels. This progress provides a good framework for guiding the future inter-agency response to natural disasters. Other factors, such as the adequacy of financial and in kind contributions to relief and recovery and efforts to alleviate the immediate effects of natural disasters, are also critical to the success of joint disaster response efforts.

3. The frequency and the magnitude of natural disasters have increased over the past decade, resulting in negative environmental consequences that have had a severe impact on populations. In 2002, over 500 loss events were recorded, resulting in economic losses estimated at $55 billion — a significant increase from the $35 billion for 2001.[1] This increase in economic losses must be viewed with reference to the types and locations of disasters. For example, almost $20 billion of that $55 billion represents the economic losses incurred due to the floods across Europe in 2002.[2] Other losses were due to climatic events in the United States and winter storms that struck Western and Central Europe towards the end of 2002. In these cases the response and reconstruction activities were to a great extent financed domestically or with the support of regional organizations, where appropriate.

4. In many disaster-prone countries in the developing world, economic losses incurred due to natural disasters are often less costly because infrastructure costs, including property value, can be lower than in the industrialized world. However, the economic losses that occur must be considered substantial, relative to the weak economic circumstances of many vulnerable countries. In addition, developing countries suffer from a higher rate of deaths due to natural disasters: in 2002, of the estimated 11,000 deaths due to natural disasters, over 9,000 occurred in developing countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.[3]

5. The Financial Tracking System maintained by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shows that global humanitarian aid for natural disasters has fluctuated over the last decade, with annual contributions ranging from $77 million in 1993 to $1.1 billion in 1998, the year of hurricane Mitch. In 1999 some $296 million was contributed in response to natural disasters. In 2000 this figure rose to $420 million, decreasing to $332 million in 2001 and $238 million in 2002.[4] It is of note that the vast majority of the funds disbursed for natural disasters during the last decade were provided to developing countries.

6. However, these figures cannot be a realistic reflection of the overall costs of the response, as they do not always include in kind contributions, nor the value of the response provided locally. National authorities, the affected communities, civil society and local actors carry the initial burden of responding to the vast majority of natural hazards using local resources. Inadequate preparedness, response and reduction capacities in disaster-prone areas will also result in much more loss of life, especially when disaster management efforts are constrained by capacity limitations. Supporting the preparedness and response efforts of national and regional actors is therefore crucial. The United Nations system will work to promote disaster reduction efforts as a solid investment towards saving lives, reducing losses and sustaining human development.

III. Strengthening natural disaster preparedness and response capacities

7. The actions undertaken immediately after the occurrence of a natural disaster are likely to have the most quantifiable impact on the living conditions of the affected population. A number of agencies are working to better integrate their activities to ensure that all the needs of affected populations are addressed. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system contributed a coordinated humanitarian response in several ways during the reporting period. Focusing on supporting the immediate response, eight UNDAC emergency response missions were deployed in 2003 in response to natural disasters in Algeria, Argentina, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. These UNDAC missions made use of emergency managers from the various countries and from the United Nations system.

8. The World Food Programme (WFP) recognizes natural disasters as a major contributor to food insecurity. In 2002, WFP assisted 44 million people suffering from acute crises, the majority of whom were victims of natural disasters, including drought, floods, earthquakes and hurricanes. In close cooperation with humanitarian partners, the United Nations Children's Fund supported the response of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the earthquake in Qazvin, Hamedan and Zanjan provinces with the provision of water and sanitation supplies and psychological assistance for children. Shelter, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as education and child protection support, were provided in response to the floods and drought that occurred in various parts of the Sudan. These are only some of the areas that need to be dealt with in response to natural disasters.

9. The need to support the capacities of regional, national and local disaster response actors is crucial, especially considering that the immediate response in times of disaster is often a local one. In recognition of the need to utilize personnel familiar with vulnerable regions and to strengthen response capacities at the local and regional levels, the UNDAC system was extended to Asia, where two UNDAC induction courses, sponsored by the Governments of India and Japan, were conducted. Disaster-prone countries in Africa will also need to become part of the UNDAC system, and to this end the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is negotiating a memorandum of understanding with the Economic Community of West African States that includes a provision to that effect. Member States are invited to support this initiative.

10. Member States have recognized that an immediate response to the sudden onset of a natural disaster is crucial and sought to support the international efforts in this regard by adopting General Assembly resolution 57/150 of 16 December 2002, "Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance". The resolution urges Member States to facilitate the deployment of international urban search and rescue teams in the case of emergencies involving collapsed structures, especially earthquakes, in accordance with the guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG). It further calls on Member States to facilitate procedures related to the entry and transit of search and rescue staff and their equipment. These provisions were successfully put into practice in the response to earthquakes in Turkey and Algeria in March 2003, which included the dispatch of UNDAC teams to assist the affected Governments.

11. The coherence and timeliness of response can also benefit from a better awareness of and guidance from existing international and national instruments applicable to natural disaster situations. In this regard, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has conducted a series of consultations with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Governments on the current state of international laws relating to disaster response. The resulting legal study identifies more than 300 separate treaties and other legal documents containing elements of international disaster response law. Field studies in three regions have examined the impacts of the various laws on the effectiveness of disaster response and the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The findings of these studies will be presented to Governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2003, to be followed by reports to the United Nations system in 2004.

12. To support planning preparedness and response activities, humanitarian actors involved in rapid response to natural disasters may also benefit from the Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities, which provides information on specialized personnel and teams of technical specialists and on relief supplies, equipment and services that may be available within the system for use on short notice as well as information from Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Work has also begun on the directory of advanced technologies for disaster response, to be established as a new part of the Central Register. Through close collaboration with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, experts on disaster reduction will also be included in the Central Register.

13. The regional disaster advisers outposted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in disaster-prone regions are enhancing the joint planning and programming among these three agencies, and their collaboration in the area of disaster management has increased considerably and will help to increase further the effectiveness of United Nations-supported capacity-building programmes in the field. Workshops and other training initiatives have supported capacity-building initiatives in the Pacific region, the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. In these regions, closer links are being built with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and UNDP, which are promoting coherent approaches aimed at integrating the central aspects of their respective regional efforts. The United Nations Disaster Management Training Programme,

managed by UNDP, helps to build national and regional capacities for disaster management through national and regional workshops in disaster-prone countries.

14. Other initiatives being carried out to strengthen regional disaster management capacities involve the regional offices of the World Health Organization (WHO), especially the Regional Office for the Americas/Pan American Health Organization, which has emphasized the link between natural disasters and development and is focusing not only on capacity-building at the local and national levels but also on assisting the health sector in contingency planning and on promoting the enforcement of stringent construction standards for hospitals so that they can resist natural hazards. WHO is also working with national authorities to strengthen their position, to institutionalize disaster management in all areas of the health sector and to sensitize the agencies and authorities involved in preparedness to be more efficient in case they need to respond. The multi-hazard, multisectoral approach seems to have been successful in some countries, especially countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that are capable of doing a credible rapid needs assessment and damage analysis after natural disasters without any assistance from the international community.

15. The United Nations Regional Inter-Agency Support Office in southern Africa works closely with the Southern African Development Community and has been providing support to address the situation in southern Africa, while seeking to ensure the cohesion and complementarity of disaster management efforts at the regional level. The inter-agency nature of the Support Office encourages joint programming and also allows the United Nations and its partners to draw from a wide range of expertise to support the various aspects of the regional crises.

16. Apart from regional support, there is also a clear need for the United Nations to continue to support local actors that are at the forefront of the response. Evaluations of the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 have shown that when dealing with the immediate effects of the disaster, the fastest, most efficient and best-targeted response was delivered by a local organization, the Self-Employed Women's Association, which was able to rely on local capacities directly involving beneficiaries.[5]

17. In this particular case, it seems apparent that a local response had the biggest immediate impact on the affected population for a number of reasons, including the fact that such organizations are present at and immediately following the occurrence of a catastrophe. Local organizations can also rely on their membership in the community to more quickly assess and address humanitarian needs. The Gujarat experience does not necessarily constitute a recipe for success. The actions and contributions of national Governments and regional organizations in collaboration with the international community are also necessary and need to be well coordinated. The well-functioning role of Government is an essential determinant of timely and effective assistance.

18. The May 2003 earthquake in Algeria killed 2,266 people and injured over 10,000 others. Swift action by the Algerian Government, including the establishment of a crisis unit by national authorities, facilitated the coordination efforts. The contributions provided by the international community were also crucial in supporting local response efforts. IFRC reported that its appeal for the Algeria earthquake elicited 120 per cent of the amount requested.

19. Other initiatives aimed at improving response capacities at the national level have proved successful. Some elements of these initiatives may be useful for other situations. The Rapid Emergency Assessment and Coordination Team in Tajikistan brings together representatives of United Nations agencies, of international organizations and donors working in the field of disaster preparedness and response and of the Tajik Ministry of Emergency Situations. It meets on a routine basis to coordinate activities in the spheres of disaster preparedness, contingency planning and response mechanisms.

Response to environmental emergencies

20. In the area of environmental disasters, it is crucial to ensure that the response is timely and efficient. To strengthen such efforts, the joint Environmental Emergencies Section of the United Nations Environment Programme and of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is focusing on upgrading the humanitarian community's capacity to respond rapidly to industrial accidents and environmental consequences of natural disasters. This process is guided by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, which launched a global partnership to promote an integrated approach to prevention of preparedness for and response to environmental emergencies in support of sustainable development.

IV. Relief to development

21. The actions of Governments and civil society, with support from the international community, have produced compelling evidence that show how appropriate interventions in disaster reduction can lead to a measurable reduction in disaster occurrence and losses. The enormous losses incurred in recent large disasters could have been reduced had such approaches been comprehensively factored into development processes in the past. The mainstreaming of disaster reduction into development and post-disaster recovery is therefore an essential component of sustainable human development. It is a challenge that requires the participation of all the key stakeholders at the local, national, regional and international levels.

22. Capacity-building programmes were initiated in various countries worldwide to promote the integration of disaster reduction into development concerns. In 2002-2003, UNDP participated in over 18 disaster recovery initiatives worldwide and successfully utilized the small window of opportunity following a disaster to effectively integrate risk reduction concerns into recovery efforts. UNDP has supported sustainable recovery frameworks and programming in 16 countries. During the reporting period UNDP provided relief grants for over 38 disaster situations worldwide to support the coordination functions of the Resident Coordinator during those situations and participated in UNDAC assessment missions.

23. In the window of opportunity following the March 2002 earthquake in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush Mountains, support was provided for training the informal construction sectors in earthquake-resistant techniques and for community-based organizations in the area of disaster preparedness. This programme will continue in 2003.

24. The lack of capacity to reduce the impact of natural hazards remains a major burden for developing countries, in particular least developed countries. Disaster risk accumulates rapidly with increasing hazard impacts. The prevalence of unplanned human settlements in hazard-prone areas and poor land-use and development practices, including in urban areas, contribute to disaster risks. This continues to characterize development in many least developed countries and can lead to greater physical, social and economic vulnerability.

25. To further mainstream disaster reduction into post-disaster recovery, UNDP supported sustainable recovery frameworks and programming in 12 countries. Joint recovery missions with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and/or planning missions have been sent to, inter alia, the Goma volcano, the Golestan floods in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Mauritania. Following the requests by the General Assembly to strengthen operational activities and capacity-building in natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness, UNDP has contributed to increased capacities for disaster reduction in 33 countries worldwide, including through early warning systems, the strengthening of national disaster offices, risk reduction tools and strategies and support for legislative systems. In some cases, risk reduction strategies and platforms have been created. In others, national and subregional networks have facilitated a lessons-learned type of process.

26. The *World Vulnerability Report*, to be launched in November 2003, is expected to contribute to increased awareness of the importance of reducing disaster risk. The report will include a global multiple risk index, highlight contemporary trends in the evolution of natural disaster risk and vulnerability patterns and advocate the role of relevant policies and strategies for reducing disaster risks.

27. The importance of integrating risk reduction into development planning and post-disaster recovery is also expected to be highlighted during the 10-year review of the Yokohama Strategy and should be discussed during the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005, under the auspices of the United Nations and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

28. **To successfully reduce the impact of natural disasters on affected communities, it is crucial for the international community to collaborate with vulnerable countries and regions to ensure that optimum use is made of the available disaster management tools and initiatives. Recent natural disasters, such as the earthquakes in Turkey and Algeria in May 2003, have demonstrated the importance of timely, efficient and coordinated responses from affected Governments, in cooperation with the international community and the tools at its disposal, in particular the INSARAG guidelines. Member States in disaster-prone regions are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the INSARAG guidelines in order to ensure a coordinated, rapid response of international urban search and rescue teams in the event of the sudden onset of a disaster.**

29. **The UNDAC system continues to be a valuable tool by which disaster management expertise is made available by Member States to respond to the sudden onset of emergencies. The membership has been further expanded and**

is now deploying an increasing number of personnel from disaster-prone regions. However, there continues to be a need to expand the UNDAC membership to Africa, and donors are invited to support ongoing efforts in order to expand the availability of the teams and their coverage of disasters globally.

30. **There is also a need to gain a more precise understanding of the impact of levels of funding on natural disaster response. Although there exist figures that reflect the contributions to natural disaster response, it is not clear if adequate support is being provided to address capacity-building and post-disaster recovery needs. Several entities compile statistics relating to natural disasters, dealing with issues such as economic losses, disaster occurrences, number of fatalities and contributions made to support natural disaster response. Currently, disaster data is collated for a variety of purposes, and, thus, the information can be inconsistent. Although this could be partly a result of the lack of an agreed definition of what constitutes a natural disaster, it nevertheless complicates efforts to compile consistent statistical information on natural disasters. This hinders the development of a definitive analysis of the impact of natural disasters. Member States may therefore wish to explore this matter and work with the humanitarian community to ensure that information on natural disasters is streamlined.**

Notes

[1] See *topics: Natural Catastrophes 2002*, published by the Munich Re Group; available at www.munichre.com.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See *World Disasters Report 2003*, published by IFRC; available at www.ifrc.org.